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SUBJECT: INCUMBENT PARVANOV SCORES LANDSLIDE VICTORY IN BULGARIAN  
PRESIDENTIAL RUN-OFF

Ref: (A) SOFIA 1370, (B) SOFIA 1465, (C) E-GRAM 3 FROM SOFIA, (D)  
SOFIA 661

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Incumbent President Georgi Parvanov scored a decisive victory against extreme nationalist Volen Siderov in the October 29 run-off, becoming Bulgaria's first president re-elected since communism collapsed. The former Socialist leader captured 75.9 percent of a weak turnout, an unprecedented result for Bulgarian post-communist elections, while Siderov had 24.1 percent. In an election-night news conference, Parvanov said he would stick to his "predictable and consistent" foreign policies and maintain his tolerant, balanced tone at home, which have won him wide popularity over the past five years. Siderov admitted defeat but presented his loss as a success for his young party. The non-partisan Central Electoral Commission said there were no serious election irregularities. Parvanov will take an oath for a second five-year term in office January 22. His victory will further stabilize the Socialist-led government he helped create, bolster his profile as Bulgaria's most prominent politician in what is otherwise a largely ceremonial post, and add continuity to a strong relationship with the U.S. END SUMMARY

#### UNPRECEDENTED VICTORY

12. (SBU) His unprecedented 76 percent majority is a stunning success for 49-year-old Parvanov, the mild-mannered historian who won a surprise election victory five years ago by a negligible margin (Ref. A, B). The former Socialist leader, who has won admiration for his moderate rhetoric and statesmanlike positions on both domestic and foreign policy issues, won the election in every single electoral region, garnering votes from all age groups and social strata. Campaigning under the slogan "President of All Bulgarians," he was backed by all three parties in the ruling Socialist-led coalition that also includes the ethnic Turkish Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) and ex-PM Simeon Saxe-Coburg's National Movement for Simeon II. He also garnered the votes of some 60 percent of the center-right voters who cast their vote in the run-off, although many stayed home after the bitter defeat of their candidate in the first round (Ref. C).

#### NO FOREIGN POLICY CHANGES

13. (U) A jubilant Parvanov told an election night news conference he expected a stronger second term in office, but made clear he would not make any drastic changes to his current policies. A consistent voice in support of a moderate, pro-U.S. foreign policy, especially in the GWOT, Iraq and Afghanistan, Parvanov said he would stick to his "predictable and consistent foreign policy," and vowed that Bulgaria would remain a reliable international partner. "Our foreign policy will continue to be active, effective and predictable, standing up for our national identity and a worthy membership of the EU," said Parvanov, under whose first term in office Bulgaria joined NATO and finalized EU accession talks. With regard to domestic policies, Parvanov said he would continue to pay special attention to social issues, work to improve the effectiveness of state administration, work closely with local

governments, and support armed-forces modernization. Widely viewed as the godfather of the current Socialist-led coalition, Parvanov said he would continue his "working relationship" with the government of Sergei Stanishev, but noted he would not spare any criticism.

#### SIDEROV PRESENTS LOSS AS "MAJOR SUCCESS"

14. (SBU) The leader of extreme nationalist Ataka party Volen Siderov, who campaigned on populist, anti-government rhetoric, put a brave face on his election loss, saying it represented the "awakening of the Bulgarian people" and a "major success" for his young party, formed in mid-2005 (Ref. D.). Siderov, a former journalist, noted that he won twice as many votes in the presidential election as Ataka received in the 2005 general election. He said his party has become a "major factor" in Bulgarian politics and forecast it would do even better in the 2007 local polls. Although admitting defeat, Siderov accused the Socialists and the MRF of election fraud, saying that the election results in the MRF-controlled municipalities had been manipulated.

#### PROTEST VOTE

15. (SBU) Siderov, who won the votes of discontented Bulgarians by accusing mainstream politicians of corruption and lack of attention to the hardships of ordinary people, said the election results confirmed his party as the only alternative to the "corrupt ruling clique." He called Parvanov "the candidate of the mafia and the MRF," and again blasted him for engineering the "corrupt" Socialist-led government and bringing the ethnic Turkish MRF into it. Known for his strong anti-Turkish views, Siderov went as far as to describe as "symbolic" the fact that the day of the run-off coincided with Turkey's national day.

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16. (SBU) Voter turnout in the run-off was around 41 percent, according to preliminary data, compared to 42.5 percent in the first round a week ago and 55 percent in the presidential run-off five years ago. Commentators attributed the low turnout to general discontent with mainstream parties, the absence in the run-off of a right-wing candidate, and the largely ceremonial powers of the president. In nominal terms, support for Parvanov increased by 14 percent in the run-off compared to his first-round result, while support for Siderov rose by seven percent. The majority of center-right voters skipped the vote, and of those who cast their ballots some 60-65 percent backed Parvanov.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: Parvanov's re-election is a precedent for post-communist Bulgaria, where no party or president has won a second term in office. Despite the largely ceremonial post, the President's record-high result will bolster his standing as Bulgaria's most influential politician and further stabilize the three-party coalition he helped create. Much of Siderov's support represents a protest vote rather than endorsement of his xenophobic, anti-U.S. views. The limited rise in his support in the run-off illustrates the narrow potential of his Ataka party to attract broader support absent a reversal of Bulgaria's economic fortunes or some other external shock. The center-right, which failed to unite around a strong candidate, showed once again that it never misses an opportunity to miss an opportunity. The shock of this loss should logically lead to the political demise of former Prime Minister Ivan Kostov, whose distaste for his old colleagues from the anti-communist movement seems stronger than his dislike of the Socialists. But don't count on it.

18. With the Presidential race finished and EU entry around the corner, Bulgaria enters a new political season. Parvanov's easy re-election symbolizes the stability that Bulgaria needs to project as a new EU member seeking increased foreign investment. Beneath the surface, though, lurk several sources of friction or weakness: the complex and subtle struggle between Parvanov and Prime Minister Stanishev over party control; dim prospects for the center-right to re-group as a potent force capable of attracting voters; and the wild-card chance for a new political alignment if the party of

charismatic Sofia Mayor Borissov gathers steam. In short, a disgruntled and apathetic electorate will have no shortage of political theater to consider, little of which they appear to connect with their everyday lives. END COMMENT  
BEYRLE